



News Release

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How should water rights be administered in Washington?

OLYMPIA – The Department of Ecology (Ecology) is hosting five public workshops around the state to get ideas from people about what should be included in a new regulation that would direct how the department administers water rights.

Some background

Water rights are the mechanism to allow people, cities, farmers, parks and industries to legally use water. For example, cities and housing developments have water rights to provide water to homes and parks, farmers have water rights to irrigate crops and industries have water rights to run manufacturing facilities.

Since 1917, Washington state has issued water right permits that allow people to install pipes or wells to withdraw water from lakes, streams and underground aquifers. Once the water has been put to use in accordance with the permit, Ecology (the agency now responsible for issuing water rights) issues water right certificates.

Today, citizens and organizations hold approximately 65,000 water right permits and certificates. In addition, approximately 5,300 communities and businesses have applied for new permits.

Proposal to change how water rights are administered

Over time, the way water rights are issued and managed has changed. According to Keith Phillips, who manages Ecology's water-resources program, the department wants to talk with people about how best to develop a rule for administering and managing of water right permits.

"Consistency, clarity and predictability are key to how Ecology administers water rights," said Phillips. "Communities, businesses and others who supply water to people, businesses and farms in our state deserve predictability."

A goal of the regulation is to provide guidance to Ecology staff, water-right permit holders and applicants on how the agency administers water rights. The proposed rule is a first step toward replacing the current rule that is outdated and incomplete, said Phillips.

"The current rule does not reflect more than 30 years of legislative and case laws," said Phillips. "We need to catch up with the times."

Ecology is considering proposals that would apply to: requests to extend the development of a permit; how water rights are evaluated; what is necessary to show water has been legally put to use; and how to correct past administrative errors.

People are encouraged to participate at public workshops that will begin next week.

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SPOKANE	1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Jan. 9, at Spokane Community College, Big Foot Rm., N. 1810 Greene St.
TRI-CITIES	1:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 10, at Ecology's Kennewick Office, 1315 W. 4 th Ave.
WENATCHEE	9:30 a.m. on Thursday, Jan. 11, at Wenatchee City Hall council chambers, 129 S. Chelan
EVERETT	9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 17, at Everett Community College, Jackson Center Conf. Rm., 801 Wetmore Ave.
LACEY	9:30 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 19, at the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Sawyer Hall, 510 Desmond Dr.

Written comments and ideas on what should be covered in the proposed rule may be submitted by Jan. 31 to Steve Hirschey, Department of Ecology, P.O. Box 47600, Olympia, Wash., 98504-7600, or via e-mail at shir461@ecy.wa.gov.

Ecology will work with its Water Resources Advisory Committee and other interested groups and citizens with the goal of adopting a rule by the summer of 2001.

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More information on Department of Ecology's web site: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/laws-rules/activity/wac173151.html>